

What You Need to Know About Home Smoke Alarms

- **Why Are Smoke Alarms So Important?**

Simply put—smoke alarms save lives. Smoke spreads fast when there is a fire, and smoke alarms give you time to get out. Smoke alarms could reduce your risk of dying from a fire in your home by almost half.

- **How Do I Choose An Alarm?**

Make sure the smoke alarm you choose displays the marking of a recognized testing laboratory, such as the Underwriters Lab (UL). Most smoke alarms on the market fall under two basic types: ionization and photoelectric.

According to the United States Fire Administration (USFA), it cannot be stated definitively that one is better than the other in every fire situation that could arise in a residence. Because both ionization and photoelectric smoke alarms are better at detecting distinctly different, yet potentially fatal fires, and because no one can predict what type of fire might start in a home, the USFA recommends that every residence and place where people sleep be equipped with:

- Both ionization AND photoelectric smoke alarms, OR
- Dual sensor smoke alarms, which contain both ionization and photoelectric smoke sensors.

In addition to the basic types of alarms, there are alarms made to meet the needs of people with hearing disabilities. These alarms will emit a low-pitch sound and may use strobe lights that flash and/or vibration to assist in alerting those who are unable to hear standard smoke alarms.

- **Are Smoke Alarms Expensive?**

No! There are tested and approved units on the market for \$10-\$15. Properly installed and maintained smoke alarms are considered to be one of the least expensive means of providing an early warning of a potentially deadly fire.

- **Where Should I Install Smoke Alarms?**

Smoke alarms should be installed as follows:

- In every bedroom
- In every hallway leading to a bedroom
- On every level of the home (including the basement)

Places to avoid include: garages, kitchens, and bathrooms. [Consult the manufacturer's installation instructions for detailed installation instructions.](#)

Most instructions recommend installing smoke alarms on the ceiling, or on the walls between 6 and 12 inches below the ceiling. Avoid installing alarms too close to heating ducts, air vents, and fluorescent lights.

- **How Do I Maintain My Smoke Alarm?**

Smoke alarms can only work if they are properly located, installed, and maintained. Roughly two-thirds of home fire deaths happen in homes with either no smoke alarms or no smoke alarms that work.

- Test alarms at least once a month by pushing the test button.
- Smoke alarms with non-replaceable batteries are designed to work for 10 years. If the alarm chirps, warning that the battery is low, replace the entire alarm immediately.
- For smoke alarms with any other type of battery, replace batteries at least once a year. If the alarm chirps, replace the battery right away.
- If a smoke alarm does not respond when tested, it needs to be replaced.
- Gently vacuum the grillwork of your alarm to remove dust, bugs, and other debris that may prevent the alarm from functioning properly.

- **My Smoke Alarms Are Installed & Working, What Now?**

Make sure your family knows the sound of a smoke alarm and what it means. Talk to them about what to do in the event that the alarm goes off. People who wake up to the sound of a smoke alarm are often confused, especially children and the elderly. To avoid panic, make sure that you have rehearsed an exit plan. For more information on exit plans, visit our link to [Exit Drills in the Home \(EDITH\)](#).